DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 142 EC 100 717

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TITLE The Disturbing Child: A Validation Study.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention, The Council for Exceptional Children (55th, Atlanta, Georgia, April 11-15, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; *Emotionally Disturbed; Research Reviews (Publications); *Theories; Validity

ABSTRACT

Reviewed are studies investigating the relative validity of the construct of differential disturbingness of behaviors in children. Among findings cited is that individuals' ratings of the disturbingness of behavior were highly predictive of subsequent ratings of a hypothetical child as a function of the child's behavior. (SBH)

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The Disturbing Child: A Validation Study

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The Disturbing Child: A Validation Study

Traditional theories of emotional disturbance have suggested that the condition is the result of inadequacies within the child. Rhodes (1967) suggested that the child's behavior and reactions to that behavior may result in "ecological disturbance". Ecological theory, then, rests on the assumption that behaviors exhibited by children are differentially disturbing to individuals who might interact with those children. If behaviors are differentially disturbing, the differences may be a source of differential interactions and thereby result in "disturbance" in an ecological sense. The intent and purpose of the results which are presented was to investigate the relative validity of the construct of differential disturbingness of behaviors.

Cronbach (1971) suggested that attempts at construct validity should include three types of studies; logical investigation as well as correlational and experimental analyses. The results of this validity study will be reported with regard to these same dimensions.

Logical Analyses

This step in construct validation examines the consistency between the construct and the measurement formats. In each of the subsequent stages of this report, a scale which asked individuals to rate the relative "disturbingness" of behaviors was utilized. The content of that scale was based on previous research which had suggested that the items were indicative of varieties of emotional disturbance. A five-point continuum was utilized to permit ratings from not very disturbing (1) to very disturbing (5) to be represented.

Correlational Analyses

Varieties of correlational analyses include determining if clusters of items can be identified within the totality of items (i.e., factor analysis results), determining if two groups of individuals likely to differ on the construct in question in fact do differ on the construct measure and/or determining if items within a construct are related but can be represented as different aspects of the construct.

Algozzine (1977a) has shown that individuals ratings of the "disturbingness" of the 55 items on the Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Paterson, 1975) could be grouped into four meaningful factors. The first represented behaviors which were bothersome because they were indicative of immature children; the second were indicative of defiant children; the third were motorically disturbing; and the last were disturbing due to their connotation of delinquency. Within the construct of disturbing behavior, then, four factors have been delimited; in fact, they are moderately correlated with each other (Algozzine, 1977a) except for the third factor. The four dimensions were shown to be differentially disturbing; the socially defiant behaviors were more bothersome than the others.

Algozzine (1976; in press) has shown that individuals who work with children are differentially bothered by the behaviors. Regular teachers find them most bothersome irregardless of which factor of behaviors is being considered.

Behaviors exhibited more frequently by boys have been shown to be more disturbing than those exhibited more frequently by girls (Algozzine, 1977b).

Evidence exists, then, to support the correlational validity of the disturbingness of behavior construct. In fact, clusters of items have

been identified, differential reactions to those clusters have been shown within the overall dimension and between groups of people likely to differ in their reactions to the behaviors.

Experimental Analysis

Experimental studies help to identify influences to which the construct may be sensitive; that is, can the construct ratings be changed systematically and/or are they influential in decision making.

Herr, Algozzine and Eaves (1976) have shown that individuals' ratings of the disturbingness of behavior were decreased after an intensive practicum experience.

Curran and Algozzine (1977) have shown that individuals' ratings of the disturbingness of behavior were highly predictive of subsequent ratings of a hypothetical child as a function of the child's behavior.

Summary

Support for the basic considerations with a construct validation study have been demonstrated with regard to the disturbingness of behavior; implications with regard to these findings relate to the nature and treatment of the special education condition referred to as emotional disturbance.

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